

The Chef, the Bride and the Hungry Groom

A New Target Client

When we talk about weddings, we always seem to focus in on the bride. We are concerned about her taste, her desires, and her vision. But the grooms are beginning to surface and the landscape is changing. As I speak with many of my contemporaries around the country, I continue to hear about how much the groom has become involved in the menu planning aspect of the wedding.

With the advent of “Food TV” and the plethora of food and wine magazines, men are taking a greater interest in what is being served at their wedding. There are also other factors that are contributing to this growing interest shown by men in menu planning for weddings. Today more than ever, there are more second weddings which are resulting in older grooms that have a more sophisticated palate. These grooms in many cases are paying for the event, which certainly can peak anyone’s interest.

The Way to a Man’s Heart

There is an old saying that was handed down from mother to daughter when trying to “catch a man” for marriage. The way to a man’s heart is through his stomach. Well today, fewer women are cooking and it is not the woman that has to catch the groom, it is the caterer. Do not ignore the groom, because in many cases he represents at least 50% of the decision making power in the relationship. What better way to catch the groom than to bring the Chef into the initial conversation. When you have a groom that is interested in the menu, bring your Chef in to meet him. Let the groom feel as if his opinion matters. Find out what he likes. Is it wine selections, simple foods or a more sophisticated level of cuisine. Whatever the groom wants should be a target for you and your chef to mirror. Leaving the man out of the sales and marketing scheme could be a subtle mistake.

Conflicting Visions

I recently sat down with a bride and groom that began by telling me they heard I had a great reputation for food, but that they were unsure of what they wanted. The bride was leaning toward a more traditional seated dinner with Tenderloin and Salmon. The groom however was more interested in some food with a more ethnic flair and a bit more flavor. As I began asking them questions like “was it important for this to be elegant or casual,” the bride really wanted it to be more elegant. The groom on the other hand was looking for casual, by the water or on a beach. When he expressed that idea, she immediately remembered their first date was on a beach and they were later engaged on that same beach. Clearly, I had two different visions in front of me, but I was able to find a common factor. The question remained, how could these be merged into one menu, one event that made both of them happy?

We settled on an elegant seated dinner by the water with a casual finale. For the reception, the guests are greeted with champagne cocktails and elegant hors d'oeuvres with a taste of the Islands. Shrimp Beignets with Savory Lemon Custard, Pop in your mouth Jerk Pork Sandwiches on 1" round rolls, Spicy Cucumber Crab Shooters and Mango Chicken in Miniature Lettuce Cups.

For the dinner guests will sit down at long tables, elegantly decorated, to a three course family style Jamaican Dinner complete with Lobster, Snapper and Crab Seafood Salad, Rice and Peas, Habanero Kissed Grilled Vegetables and a Whole Suckling Pig. This menu seemed to satisfy the grooms need for casual exciting foods, while the bride was excited about the service style and variety.

After dinner all the guests will retire to an area on the beach where we will roast marshmallows, flambé' bananas in rum and they will feast on fresh fruits dipped in chocolate. All the while a steel drum band brings the reception to a frenzied conclusion with dancing and games. Both seem thrilled with the uniqueness of this concept and the flavors that will be shared with there guests.

The Final Say

Of course the object is to find out who the real decision maker is in the family. Sometimes that can be tricky, but if you cover all your bases, you are sure to be successful. By covering all your bases, I mean that you need to first ask the question- "who will be deciding on the menu". This is of course the same question as who will be choosing the caterer. By asking this question you open the door to the possibility that together they should choose the caterer. This will better position you against your competitor if they are only focusing on the bride and not paying attention to the groom's wishes.

Many times have I seen the groom appear at the last minute of the decision making process to ask questions about the budget or the terms of the contract. If you have been courting him all along, you will be in the best position to satisfy his concerns. The Groom is no longer to be ignored or set aside as a none entity. He has now become an integral part in the selling dynamic of a wedding and the way to his heart is usually through the menu.